

Nomination Synopsis: American Vulcanized Fibre Company – Wilmington Plant  
700 Maryland Avenue – Wilmington, Delaware

This nomination, prepared by the Logan Ferguson (Senior Associate, Powers and Company, Inc. in Philadelphia), was completed at the request of the current property owner who expressed interest in obtaining historic preservation tax credits to adaptively reuse this abandoned manufacturing complex. The owner intends to redevelop the property for residential use in keeping with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties. Completed in consultation with the Delaware State Historic Preservation Office and the City of Wilmington's Department of Planning and Development, the nomination was reviewed and approved by Wilmington's Design Review and Historic Preservation Commission on July 15, 2020 and is scheduled for review by the Delaware State Review Board for Historic Preservation on July 29, 2020.

Levels of significance:

State and Local

**State:** The complex represents buildings associated with an industry, centered in Wilmington, which exclusively manufactured vulcanized fibres during the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries and which, according to corporate records, enabled Delaware to be recognized as the home of “the oldest [commercial] manufacturer of vulcanized fibre in the world.”

**Local:** Surviving buildings constructed, between 1901 and 1914, represent an intact example of an industrial site featuring a comprehensive, multi-story manufacturing complex with cutting edge construction materials including reinforced concrete which has disappeared from the city's industrial landscape.

Criteria:

**A** – historic buildings that are associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.

Although the concept of vulcanized fibre is not embedded in the American psyche as some of Wilmington's other industrial products, its pervasive use in and impact on an enormous range of industries and product lines certify it as an indispensable material and testify to the strength of a company that remained in successful and continuous operation at the subject property for over 100 years.

Criteria (cont.):

**C** – architecture embodying distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction.

The site's architecture is an archetypal example of the evolution of industrial architecture in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. It not only represents the shift from heavy timber frame construction with limited architectural embellishments to a minimalist, reinforced concrete system, but also affirms the notion that the company was a pioneer beyond its commercial output. The author denotes phases of construction by using references to sections lettered A – E.

Areas of Significance: Industry and Architecture

Periods of Significance: **1901** (date when construction began under the American Vulcanized Fibre Company) through **1914** (the last period of extant construction).

Architects: William Draper Brinckle (a Wilmington architect who designed the buildings constructed in 1902 and 1903)

John Dockery Thompson, Jr. (Philadelphia/Wilmington who designed the 1906 section)

Integrity:

The American Vulcanized Fibre Company retains integrity. Both the overall form and the defining industrial characteristics remain, including its brick masonry sections, brick detailing, regular window openings with original, multi-light wood windows, wood and concrete columns, exposed wood and concrete flooring and ceiling systems, and exposed and painted brick walls. Although some window openings have been replaced or infilled, these newer elements do not detract from the overall appearance and the original fenestration patterns remain clearly visible.